New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1952

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of May 19, 1952*

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"New Faces of 1952"

DAILY NEWS

May 17, 1952

'New Faces' Just What We Need: A Fast, Funny, Handsome Revue

By JOHN CHAPMAN

If you have been worrying about Summer coming along, with all the heat and the sitting around feeling miserable with nothing to do, you may relax a bit. Just go down to the Royale Theatre on W. 45th St. and buy yourself a pair of tickets to "New Faces," a happy revue, and be confident that you're going to have a good time.

Everybody has been saying that the revue form of entertainment is outdated and we won't have the fun we used to have at the Music Box productions and the Little Shows, and now comes "New Faces" to prove that everybody was wrong. This revue, produced last evening by Leonard Sillman at precisely the right intimate theatre, the Royale, is young and peppy and handsome and funny. As its title promises, its charming principals and supporting players are new or fairly new to the Broadway stage; but its success is due in large measure to an old face—the old, old face of a veteran director, John Murray Anderson. Mr. Anderson, who dates way back, may count "New Faces of 1952" as one of his best pieces of work.

Graham Stands Out.

The engaging people who sing, joke and dance in this revue also have had inestimable assistance from a veteran scene designer, Raoul Pene du Bois, whose settings for the songs and sketches are swift and sparkling. There are excellent costumes by Thomas Becher, and du Bois, and a fine small orchestra under the direction of Anton Coppola is just right for a gay little show.

There are 17 people in the cast of "New Faces" and all of them are charming and talented. If I had to choose favorites, I'd pick Ronny Graham, for the music, lyrics and sketches he has written and for the way he acts and sings them; June Carroll, for her singing and lyrics; Eartha Kitt, for her singing of "Monotonous"; Robert Clary, for an engaging personality, and Virginia de Luce, for being an extraordinary handsome and amusing mistress of ceremonies.

Topical Sketches.

A revue is supposed to be topical, and this one is. Its topics for funpoking range from Restoration comedy to Truman Capote, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh get mixed up about which play they are doing tonight; Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" gets mixed up; there is a loony canasta game and a funny travel lecture.

My favorites among the numbers are the last two—a simple piece of idiocy titled "Whither America" in which a doctor's stethoscope becomes a charmed snake, and "The Great American Opera," a sketch by Ronny Graham which is a really sharp and pertinent burlesque of the works of Gian-Carlo Menotti.

It's going to be fun to be around town this Summer because of "New Faces," and again I want to thank John Murray Anderson for having the skill and wit to stage a revue the way it should be staged.

"NEW FACES OF 1952"

Revue with sketches mostly by Ronny Graham, Peter De Vries and Melvin Brooks; words and music mostly by Mr. Graham, June Carroll, Arthur Siegel, Sheldon Harnick and Michael Brown; devised and staged by John Murray Anderson; sketches directed by John Beal; scenery by Raoul Pene du Bois; choreography by Richard Barstow; costumes by Thomas Becher; orchestrations by Ted Royal; presented by Leonard Sillman at the Royale Theatre, May 16, 1952, with the following cast: Virginia Bosler, Robert Clary, June Carroll, Allen Conroy, Virginia de Luce, Michael Dominico, Patricia Hammerlee, Alice Ghostley, Ronny Graham, Eartha Kitt, Joe Lautner, Paul Lynde, Carol Lawrence, Bill Mullikin, and Jimmy Russell.

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

May 17, 1952

Fresh Talent In 'New Faces'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A fresh musical breeze from around a different corner hit Broadway happily for the summer last night with the premiere of Leonard Sillman's "New Faces of 1952."

Since 1934, Mr. Sillman has engaged periodically in offering fresh talents to Broadway. His new revue manages to do just that, gathering together unusual performers who have gifts and qualities that fit no familiar patterns.

The show moves so rapidly that most of the numbers seem to be on center stage before their predecessors are quite off. Only three times were players allowed even bows last night.

Wild-Eyed Humor.

The revue is of two minds. Its humor is macabre and wild-eyed. It shocks you while it makes you laugh. This state of mind, in which nothing is sacred, gets planted early, in a sketch in which a bop musician wants to know if everybody doesn't stay up four days at a time.

There is a devastating satire on moss-covered Southern novelists, and a madly twisted version of "Death of a Salesman." You may have to go to hear the song about why "You can't chop your poppa up in Massachusetts" to believe it is uproarious. This stuff kids neuroses but it is also penetrating and delightfully independent in its refusal to stand in awe of anything or anybody.

In its other, contrasting mood, the show indulges in gentle, perfumed sentiment, without apology. There is a lovely musical playlet about a Scotch girl growing up, and genuine pathos in a song and ballet about two rich old maids.

In-Between Numbers.

In between there are numbers for about any taste, like the satire on costume musicals, the insane new card game, or the snake-charming fantasy.

Popping up through the whole evening as performer or author is Ronny Graham, whose weird, offbeat talent constantly sets a tone to the show. His disordered extremes of pleasure and his ecstasy over morbidity add up to high-flying escapism for everybody.

Trailing or joining him is Alice Ghostley, a comedienne of originality and quality, who tore the house apart last night with Boston Beguine, a sort of Back Bay hubba hubba. Pint-sized Robert Clary can imitate Johnny Ray to the last tear if need be, and can also be deeply touching in such sweetly sentimental stuff as "I'm in Love With Miss Logan."

Dunham Alumna.

For me, there should be more of Eartha Kitt. An alumna of Katherine Dunham and Orson Welles activities, she has a violent feline quality, striking tenseness on the stage, and a voice that can rival Yma Sumac's but rarely bothers.

Virginia de Luce, and it should be de Luscious, tries all evening to finish a song, but announces numbers instead. June Carroll has a dark, dramatic quality for a couple of emotional songs, and crops up on the list of writer credits. Rosemary O'Reilly handles a couple of ballads sweetly, and Paul Lynde has a laughable time over African disasters.

The elegance of John Murray Anderson's staging is welcomely apparent, and the intelligent direction of sketches by John Beal gives them novel impact.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

May 17, 1952

'New Faces of 1952'

By WALTER F. KERR

"NEW FACES OF 1952" which bounded into the Royale last night, is a good-looking, fast-moving intimate revue with a tremendous polish on it. The high-spirited show, which opened last night, is primarily intended as a showcase for seventeen exuberant youngsters, and there is a lot of promise in the boys and girls who hurl themselves about the stage. But the real skill, speed and color which keep the frolic looking reasonably professional come from a couple of oldsters—John Murray Anderson and Raoul Pene du Bois.

Du Bois has done a dozen or more sly and exhilarating backgrounds, all of them simple, and most of them delightfully fresh. His silhouette of a single armchair for a sad little song called "Guess Who I Saw Today" is a model of economy and suggestion, his sentimental Scottish cromo for "Nanty Puts Her Hair Up" is charming, and his nightmare patchwork for a burlesque of the Menotti operas is at least as funny as the sketch.

John Murray Anderson has paced the proceedings with tremendous, though never frantic, drive, and his taste and authority go a long way toward making some in-and-out materials seem slick and consistently gay.

The weakness of the show, when it seeps through, is in its comedy. By far the largest part of this has been provided by an aggressive though never disagreeable young man named Ronny Graham, who has not only written a batch of sketches and lyrics but who pops up frequently as his own principal performer. I find that I am of two minds about Mr. Graham. When he is setting the stage, at curtain time, by promising to go the Drama Quartette three better and read an entire revue, he is bright, amiable, and sophisticated. But I found his bop musician in an item called "Crazy, Man!" pretty nightclubby, a travelogue written entirely in cliches rather reminiscent of certain television programs, and his parody of Truman Capote ("The Chlorophyll Clarinet") fairly easy stuff.

Mr. Graham is a triple-threat man with a bright future ahead of him, and I hope that he will settle down to some less random, and more sharply pointed, nonsense.

My own nomination for heroine of the evening is Miss Alice Ghostley, a patient, determined comedienne with vast amounts of self control and a real instinct for satirical mayhem. She stops the first act cold with what is probably the evening's happiest inspiration—a Boston Beguine—as she belt out some stentorian rhythms to the accompaniment of wonderfully inhibited gestures. She is funny, too, as the woebegone mother in a sketch which turns "Death of a Salesman" into a family affair among pickpockets, and I even liked her in a Restoration Comedy bit which tends to labor a single joke to infinity.

Second in command — second only because she has not been given all the material she deserves —is Eartha Kitt, a fetchingly catlike songstress who does inexplicably pleasant things with a little French lyric, "Bal Petit Bal," and who drives home a sulky number called "Monotonous" to top the second act.

Pleasant in their own ways are Rosemary O'Reilly, who sings "Guess Who I Saw Today," Jimmy Russell, who dances a fine reprise to "Love Is a Simple Thing," Patricia Hammerlee, who makes a frenzied Lizzie Borden in a conventional but still rousing hoe-down number, and Paul Lynde, whose battered African explorer emerges as the funniest bit of the evening.

June Carroll does nicely in a whimsical exploration of the next step after Canasta, and she sings several of the minor ballads pleasantly. She is, however, pretty much responsible for the low point of the entertainment—a sentimental reverie called "Penny Candy." Miss Carroll wrote the lyrics for this one, and she sings them herself, and it misses its nostalgic mark all the way.

If the sketches aren't always as sharp and as funny as they might be, "New Faces of 1952" is still a bright and cheerful show, and it's full of friendly people.

Journal American

May 17, 1952

Not the Greatest Ever But Fresh and Bright

By JOHN McCLAIN

AT LAST NIGHT'S opening of "New Faces of 1952" the elegant audience screamed, whistled, rocked with laughter and nearly blew the roof off the hall when the final curtain descended. There was every indication, in other words, that Leonard Sillman's latest revue is a smashing success.

I agree, but to a more modest degree. There is no question that it is fresh and frolicsome; the score is above average; it actually has a great many bright new faces, as advertised, and it moves at a merry clip. It also has its wavering moments—not all the sketches are as funny as last night's audience indicated, nor are all the numbers as original and devastating.

Still and all it is the best new musical effort that has been produced in this sorry season and should, therefore, have a long and lucrative run.

• • •

Engaging Faces

PROBABLY THE TWO most engaging new faces are those belonging to Alice Ghostley and Ronny Graham, who carry the burden of the proceedings.

Miss Ghostley is a commedienne with a double threat—she can act and she can sing a great song, straight or comical—with the result that she stopped the show nearly every time she appeared.

Her "Boston Beguine," the plaint of a bespectacled New Englander who found love on the Boston Common, will rank with Bea Lillie's most memorable efforts.

Graham, who seems to have written a great portion of the book, music and lyrics, performs as master of ceremonies and appears in nearly all the sketches. He has a pleasantly elastic pan and a persuasive delivery which makes him very funny indeed within the limits of his own material, not all of which was THAT funny.

I thought he was most effective as the young Mr. Caput in "Oedipus Goes South" and in a sketch called "The Great American Opera," an ambitious burlesque of "The Medium" and "The Telephone."

• • •

Distinct Talent

APART FROM HIS ability as a performer he has distinct talent with the quill and the cleft. Most of his sketches show originality, but some of them have a tendency to trail off toward the end. His music and lyrics are always bright and intelligent, if not consistently professional.

Of the others in the hard-working cast I preferred Eartha Kitt, particularly with her "Bal Petit Bal" number; Paul Lynde managed to build a description of a trip to Africa into several hilarious minutes, and little Robert Clary crept into every heart with his "I'm in Love With Miss Logan."

June Carroll, who also wrote many of the lyrics, was a decorative and amiably vocal addition to the evening; Joe Lautner and Bill Mullikin handled the men's singing department with distinction and Virginia de Luce scored heavily as the big, beautiful show girl who introduces most of the acts.

There are only 17 people in the company, with everybody doubling at acting, dancing and singing, so I think it is reasonable to say that those not mentioned here are neglected only because I am running out of adjectives.

John Murray Anderson vested the thing with sing and I was particularly impressed by Thomas Becher's costumes. The scenery of Raoul Pene du Bois was always imaginative and brilliant, yet suitably suggestive.

This isn't the greatest revue ever devised, but at least it's new. And I think we're going to see a lot of these new faces —until they become quite old.

Daily Mirror

May 17, 1952

'New Faces of 1952' Is Bright and Breezy

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Leonard Sillman brought a bright and breezy revue called "New Faces of 1952" to the Royale last evening. The cast numbers a couple of dozen gifted and likable young people who have earned popularity in some of our better bistros. Some of the sketches are hilarious, some of the lyrics clever and some of the music pleasant.

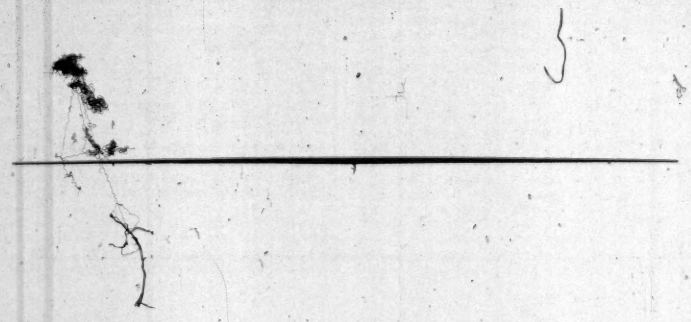
"New Faces" is what is known as an intimate revue; it constantly strives to be ultra-sophisticated, to offer the type of material that goes over big in chi-chi nightclubs, bigger even as drinks are sipped and the celebrants develop a mellow attitude.

A host of writers and composers have contributed to the proceedings, too many to catalogue here in the face of an onrushing deadline. We like particularly "Crazy, Man!" in which a Senate committee is driven wacky by a bop witness; "Time for Tea," two old maids reminiscing over their youth; "Of Fathers and Sons," or the heartbreak of a pickpocket whose son has honest instincts, and "Convention Bound," a rowdy satire.

The show-stopper of the evening was "Boston Beguine," a song satire by Alice Ghostley on culture in The Hub. Miss Ghostley is an expert comedienne with a first-rate voice. Paul Lynde garnered robust applause with "Trip of the Month," the saga of a sucker who won a safari to the African jungle. And Eartha Kitt drew blistering palm beats with "Monotonous." She has a fascinating trick voice, and has learned a lot about showmanship.

Ronny Graham is the most consistent laugh provoker of the evening. He is a genuinely funny comic and an accomplished penner of amusing sketches. He gets able support from June Carroll, who appears to be equally versatile. Virginia Bosler, a graceful dancer with pert and expressive features, also caught our eye. If she can act, the movie scouts should be testing her.

The first-nighters loved "New Faces of 1952." Their applause rang to the Royale's rafters, and they strained their ribs laughing. We shared their enthusiasm on occasion. In our opinion, the new arrival is for a special audience. The tired business man is likely to want more down-to-earth humor and chorus beauties for his $6 top.



New York Post

May 18, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Youthful Revel With 'New Faces'

Despite a popular theory to the contrary, excessive audience enthusiasm can have an unfortunate effect on a theatrical first night. At the Royale Friday evening, where Leonard Sillman's "New Faces of 1952" was being presented, the opening numbers of the new revue were hailed from the outlying reaches of the playhouse with the frantic ecstacy that might well accompany the enacting of masterpieces by geniuses. Since what was taking place on the stage was pretty obviously not that magnificent, there was a natural tendency on the part of some of us skeptics to be considerably more suspicious than we might have been.

In general, I think that our suspicions were quite justifiable. The latest edition of the recurrent 'New Faces" is certainly not the work of brilliance that the early outbursts of delight would have appeared to indicate. But, then, hardly anything could be. What it is, according to my rather chill estimate, is a lively, youthful, pleasantly exuberent musical concoction, filled with ideas, high spirits and indications of incipient talent, but one in which the zest of the ardent amateur is as often a handicap as it is an advantage. Despite the aid of such an old pro as John Murray Anderson, that semi-pro spirit does prevail.

The Targets

It struck me, for one thing, that the innumerable writers of the revue were living in the past to a remarkable degree, considering their tender years. For example, among the things satirized in the sketches are Restoration comedies, "Death of a Salesman," Gian-Carlo Menotti's "The Medium" and "The Telephone," canasta, and the once-celebrated murder case revolving about Lizzie Borden, and none of them, I believe, is any longer the timeliest of topics. Mr. Capote and "The Grass Harp" are targets of perhaps more immediate interest, and the revue seemed a little more on the job when aiming at them.

Yet, even if the objects of its raillery are not invariably of the most immediate interest, "New Faces" has the virtue of always trying. It is filled with gallant endeavors to be fresh and satirical, and, while they are far from invariably successful, there is something commendable about their spirit. The Lizzie Borden number, for example, has a highly pleasant sprightliness about it, and there are other occasions when gayety prevails. The music, too, while considerably less than notable, is unostentatiously agreeable, and, whenever the young people go into their dancing, they are worth watching.

The Performers

Television having reached the estate it has, I suppose that the series of revues put on over the course of the seasons by Mr. Sillman is chiefly notable in the public eye for having presented the eminent Imogene Coca as a new face for quite a number of years. It becomes, therefore, a question of virtually national interest whether the current edition offers a performer who is likely to achieve Miss Coca's renown. If I were asked to propose candidates for success in the theater, if not in the puzzling field of television, I would nominate two girls named Eartha Kitt and Virginia de Luce as being of most interest.

Miss Kitt, a dusky young singer who has appeared in local night clubs, can manage a sultry number with force and authority and has the added advantage of being a handsome girl of very definite distinction. Miss de Luce, a gay and good-looking blond, strolls through the show debonairly and reveals a sense of humor that is not too boisterous. Among the men, another night-club performer named Ronny Graham, who has also written a lot of the show's material, has a certain sly gift for comedy that was at its most vigorous when he was being a little harsh on Mr. Capote. On the whole, "New Faces" struck me as an amiable collegiate revel.

The New York Times

May 17, 1952

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Don't look now, but an excellent light revue has come to town. "New Faces of 1952," which opened at the Royale last evening, includes some new talent as well as new faces, and it has been expertly staged by John Murray Anderson. According to the program, the cast includes seventeen performers, singers and dancers, none of whom has been famous up to now, and the sketches, songs and lyrics have been written by eight hidden geniuses.

But some of them are not going to be obscure for longer than another half hour. For Alice Ghostley, a funny ballad singer and clown, has a voice as well as a sense of humor. Eartha Kitt not only looks incendiary but she can make a song burst into flame. June Carroll can sing and also write lyrics. And Ronny Graham is a grinning droll with authority as well as good nature.

* * *

But it is impossible to pick and choose much among the seventeen. For Robert Clary's love-song to his school teacher and Paul Lynde's grisly travel story from Africa are about as fascinating as anything in the show. This column could dispense with an unintelligible burlesque of Restoration drama. But everything else is original or funny or both; and invariably the performers make the most of the material.

The contemporary satires are swift and witty. They have turned "Death of a Salesman" upside down, making perfect logic in reverse. They give us an uproarious cartoon of Truman Capote and Southern literature, and a good slapstick version of "The Medium" and a comic anecdote about the Oliviers trying to remember which play they are supposed to be acting. There has been nothing quite so literate on our revue stage for a long time. Without being precious or snobbish, "New Faces of 1952" has intelligence.

None of its predecessors has been so brilliantly staged. Raoul Pène du Bois' settings are modern, light-footed and inventive, and Thomas Becher's costumes are rich in design as well as fabric. Everyone associated with the production works in the same key of pace and skimming good nature. Although it has considerable splendor, nothing weighs heavily on the buoyant spirit of a bright and gay revue.

And no one is in bad humor. Credit "New Faces" with being uninfected with the sour tone of most of the defamation of character that passes for humor on the radio and stage in this mechanical era. For Leonard Sillman, the diligent impresario, has assembled a company of attractive young people who are overflowing with genuine talent. The summer nights may not be so desolate after all.

"Tovarich"

Journal-American

May 15, 1952

Extremely Hilarious And Poignant

By JOHN McCLAIN

AS the second offering of their Spring series, the New York City Theatre Company presented a revival of "Tovarich" at their ample auditorium last night and in my opinion maintained the 1,000 per cent batting average established by the success of "The Male Animal" a few weeks ago.

This latest effort, a Jacques Deval comedy adapted by Robert E. Sherwood, is still extremely hilarious and poignant.

It is given fresh and imaginative mounting, the performances are almost uniformly laudable and the few plot points which have been confused by the equally confusing march of time do not seriously impede the proceedings. What a pity that someone isn't writing equally plausible nonsense today.

* * *

Life Is Ideal

"TOVARICH" (Russian for "comrade") tells the story of a Grand Duke and Duchess of Imperial Russia living in poverty in Paris in the year 1927.

The Grand Duke has a fortune in francs, given him in sacred trust by the late Czar, but both he and his wife would rather perish than touch a sou of it.

When their private money is exhausted they take positions as domestics in the home of a wealthy French banker, carefully concealing their identities. They prove to be not only the most faultless and attractive servants but also the idols of the two children in the household, a teen age boy and girl.

Life is indeed ideal until the evening of a dinner party to which the banker has invited a group of international oil operators.

The Dutch, the British and the French, it appears, are about to buy some valuable oil lands from the Russians, who are represented at the dinner by Commissar Gorotchenko, most hatefully associated with the pasts of both the Duke and Duchess.

Recognizing the royal servants, the Commissar prevails upon them to deliver the Czar's fortune to him, thus saving the oil for Russia.

* * *

Not Too Important

THE PLAY was produced here originally in 1936, in an era when this situation might have made sense. Today one cannot help squirming slightly while so much highly contested terra firma passes glibly into the hands of the Reds. But, as I say, this is not an issue important enough to deflate the high good humor of the evening as a whole.

Herbert Berghof and Uta Hagen are entirely beguiling as the devoted Grand Duke and his Duchess, and Romney Brent and Paula Lawrence are consistently comical as the banker and his wife, who supply the bourgeois background against which the jokes are bounced.

Luther Adler, the Commissar, was sufficiently suave and ominous, and I liked Peter Brandon, the banker's son, Pat Crowley, the daughter, and Edna Preston, the cook.

It seemed to me that Harry Horner contributed solidly with his sets, although there were times when the crew backstage sounded as though they were erecting the Lever Brothers building between scenes.

He also was the director, and in this department I thought he succeeded more with the smaller situations than when the stage was cluttered with players, as who doesn't?

Again, this is a revival and it isn't the foremost comedy of our generation. But in the dying days of this sad semester it certainly looks good.

"TOVARICH"

Comedy by Jacques Deval; adapted by Robert E. Sherwood; staged and designed by Harry Horner; revived by the New York Theatre Company (George Schaefer, artistic director); at the New York City Center, May 14, 1952. The cast:

Billposter.....Arny Freeman
Prince Curatieff.....Herbert Berghof
Grand Duchess Ostrivna...Uta Hagen
Olga.....Sudie Bond
Count Feodor Brekenski...John Heldabrand
Chauffourier-Dubieff.....Raymond Bramley
Fernande Dupont.....Paula Laurence
Charles Dupont..Romney Brent
Louise.....Edna Preston
Georges Dupont..Peter Brandon
Helene Dupont.....Pat Crowley
Concierge.....William Hickey
Mme. Van Hemert.....Elizabeth Dillon
Mme. Chauffourier-Dubieff..Julia Adler
Commissar Gorotchenko....Luther Adler

Daily Mirror

May 15, 1952

'Tovarich' Revival Slightly On The Slapstick Side

By ROBERT COLEMAN

After having launched its Spring comedy season at the City Center with a wonderful revival of "The Male Animal," the New York City Theatre Company failed to put its best foot forward last evening via a production of "Tovarich." Harry Horner and Noel Taylor have designed gaudy and tasteless sets and costumes, and Horner, doubling in brass as director, has staged the slick comedy with a slapstick.

Robert E. Sherwood's adaptation of the Jacques Deval original still boasts graceful and amusing dialogue which, unfortunately, is delivered by most of the cast with all the skill of a slugger trying to wallop a home run in a sandlot baseball game. The result is about what you would get in a second-rate presentation on the Summer circuit.

"Tovarich," as you may recall, has to do with a Russian Grand Duchess and her princely consort who flee to Paris after the Bolshevik Revolution. Though custodians of a huge fortune sent to France by the late Czar, they have to seek work as domestics in a banker's home to earn a living.

Representatives of the French government, royal refugees and the Soviet seek to obtain the money. The Duchess and her consort finally turn it over to a Soviet Commissar to save Russian oil fields from exploitation by foreign interests. They loathe the Communist usurpers, and particularly the ruthless Commissar who had given them a rough time of it while they were in prison, but they still love Mother Russia.

In other words, Russia uber alles. Perhaps there will come a day when the Czarists can recapture power, and they will be heirs to the oil. It is difficult for us today to understand this philosophy, but maybe we just don't understand Russians, Red or White.

Marta Abba and the late John Halliday were magnificent in Gilbert Miller's version of "Tovarich" many years ago. They had persuasive charm, high style and wonderful polish. They were perfect as the Duchess and the Prince. Uta Hagen and Herbert Berghof play the roles with zest and broad strokes rather than subtlety.

Romney Brent and Paula Laurence, under Horner's guidance, burlesque the banker and his wife. Miss Laurence, in a series of eerie gowns, really dishes out the hoke. And, be it reported, garners the lustiest laughs of the evening. By all odds the best, the most restrained and effective performance is that of Luther Adler as the Commissar. He must have directed himself.

Pat Crowley, a talented ingenue whom we have saluted on several previous occasions, is attractive, and Edna Preston quite good as a sympathetic cook. The remainder of the cast is pretty much miscast.

Since all the players involved are working at the City Center for nominal salaries, we can only regret that we aren't more appreciative of their contributions. And we should tell you that the first-nighters appeared to find "Tovarich" immensely enjoyable. Some of them even found it hilarious, judging by their robust applause and laughter.

As one who relished the initial production, we were disappointed in the current revival. But unless our eyes and ears deceived us, this probably will be a minority verdict. The New York City Theatre Company has given us some excellent entertainment at popular prices, and deserves your support.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

May 15, 1952

'Tovarich' Stirs Nostalgia for the 30's

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Looks like another hit for the City Center. Last night there was a wave of bravos to support the healthy applause for "Tovarich," through all the curtain calls.

The production strikes just the right note of nostalgia and sincerity to make the comedy as amusing, and in some ways more affecting, than it was when first done here in '36.

The play takes place in 1928, and treats the traditional situation of royalty disguised as servants.

Light-Fingered Duchess.

Here the royalty is the Grand Duchess of Russia and her Prince, exiled after the revolution, to Paris. They have banked 4,000,000 francs entrusted to them by the Czar. But in order to eat, the Duchess has taken to occasional dainty shop-lifting.

The story tells with great wit and touching charm how they finally get work in a bourgeois French household as butler and maid, and in time completely captivate two generations of the family which employs them.

Looming powerful in the play is the figure of the Commissar who wants the Czar's money. He is a cold, self-confessed villain, who has found himself in the position of having to sell oil lands to avoid a famine.

5,000,000 Lives at Stake.

The ironic comment on the Communists here is that the Commissar is willing to bargain about 5,000,000 lives, but the Grand Duchess insists on saving them. It is she, too, who has the passionate love for her country as it has always been, and would scorn encroachments on other countries as strongly as she is horrfied at losing any of her native territory.

The Grand Duchess is a figure of mature elegance and innate pride as Uta Hagen plays her. She is a figure of passion and fun, fanatical in assurance about her position, but tender, graceful and generous.

The role of the Prince is the finest thing Herbert Berghof has done in the New York theater. He emphasizes the romantic quality of the man, and the streak of immature joyousness that makes him so dear to the Duchess.

Luther Adler is sternly dominant as the Commissar, and this value is all the stronger because he makes the character suave and careless on the surface. Paula Laurence is at her most hilarious and happiest as the rich, ordinary, uncertain mistress who hires the couple. She gets big sweeping laughs, and Romney Brent stirs up an endless chuckle as her harassed husband.

Pat Crowley and Peter Brandon are a handsome and personable younger generation.

The comedy has been given a bright production by Harry Horner, with cheery transitions between the scenes. The clothes of Noel Taylor rate applause all by themselves.

Chalk up one more very happy occasion at the Center.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

May 15, 1952

'Tovarich'

By WALTER F. KERR

SIXTEEN years ago Robert Sherwood provided us with an urbane and altogether fetching adaptation of Jaques Deval's "Tovarich," and it still seems an attractive play.

It might have seemed even more attractive, though, if the revival which opened at City Center last night had something of the mannered brilliance and the consistent style which the author's worldly and witty prose asks for. Harry Horner has taken on the double task of designing and directing the current production and, though his settings—especially the tipsy Parisian skylines which dominate the stage—are bright and cheerful, his management of the actors is seriously uncertain. The evening teeters between drawing-room elegance and slightly clumsy farce, and some amiable performers are made to seem insecure and effortful from time to time.

Even so, there are delightful moments left in "Tovarich." This is the pleasantly sentimental piece about a couple of Russian exiles, the Prince Mikail Alexandrovitch Ouratieff and his beloved Grand Duchess Tatiana, who are living in heroic poverty though they have four billion francs on deposit at the bank. The money is a trust given them by the last Tsar and they will not spend a penny of it till they can return it in style to his legitimate successor.

How they are forced to hire themselves out as butler and maid to keep from starving, how they are pursued by Communist spies on the track of the cache, and how they are finally persuaded to surrender it to a ruthless Commissar—since Russia is still Russia—makes for a series of deft and occasionally touching scenes which have not quite lost their glitter.

Uta Hagen plays the volatile Grand Duchess, and she makes excellent comedy of her dismay when the authorities discover that she has been filching artichokes from the public stalls—she had prided herself on the adroitness of her petty thievery—and of her gleeful vision of the sort of revenge she will one day take on the Commissar. Miss Hagen rolls her eyes and utters throaty ejaculations with fine Slavic flavor, and she brings the play's more sober moments an affecting simplicity and directness.

Herbert Berghof is the Prince turned butler, and his performance is indicative of the directorial unevenness which mars the evening. His earlier scenes are given over to fairly self-conscious posturing and a rather too anxious attack on the slyer lines. As he moves from the romantic daydreaming of his garrett to the necessary restraint of his role as domestic, his work acquires an ingratiating ease, and he finishes the evening a good bit more stylishly than he has begun it.

The latter portions of the play, though, are slowed down from another quarter. Luther Adler has been cast as the Commissar who must make a convincing plea for the return of a fortune to the Soviet Union. With the passing of time, and in the face of an uncomfortably altered political atmosphere, the role has become a difficult one. Mr. Adler has attempted to bypass his problems with a straight-faced sobriety, a plain-spoken urgency, and the method seems to me to do damage to an otherwise light and fanciful comedy.

Paula Laurence, as the mistress of a highly unconventional household, gets a lot of fun out of her shrill embarrassment over a tense dinner party and her charmed incomprehension as the conversation turns to literature. And Romney Brent is in brisk good form as her banker husband. Here again, though, the characterizations never quite match; both Miss Laurence and Mr. Brent are effective in their own ways, but they do go their own ways—she toward farce, he toward polite comedy—and we are constantly reminded of the evening's in-and-out style.

Pat Crowley and Peter Brandon make an appealing young couple, but some of the lesser roles have been casually cast and inadequately developed. In its present state, "Tovarich" has a few too many ups and downs to make for a thoroughly satisfactory time in the theater, but the pleasures of the old play are intermittently there.

New York Post

May 15, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

Another Engaging Comedy Revival

The illustrious City Center organization last night followed its triumphant revival of "The Male Animal" with another successful production of an excellent comedy from the theater's fairly recent past. This time it is Robert E. Sherwood's adaptation of Jacques Deval's "Tovarich," the play about the White Russian emigres and the Soviet commissar, which was one of the great hits of 1936. The international atmosphere may have deteriorated considerably since then, but "Tovarich" hasn't, and it remains a gay, charming and likeable entertainment that is dated only by its air of political good nature.

You may remember "Tovarich" as the play about the gallant and improvident pair of titled exiles, who find themselves down on their luck in Paris to the extent that they take jobs as butler and maid to a French banker's family. Although they have hardly a franc between them, the prince is the proud custodian of millions that had been left him by the Czar to be used only in the interest of Russia, and to him there comes the Soviet commissar, who had been their bitter foe in the days following the Revolution, pleading that the money be turned over to the Soviet state to save Russian oil fields from foreign control.

Good Nature

It is, of course, the scene in which the Czarists and the Bolshevik get together as Russian patriots that indicates "Tovarich" hails from an earlier day, and the current production carefully reminds us that the period is 1928. Indeed, the Sherwood-Deval comedy is frankly done as a period piece, which if wise, since it is by no means a political play. Its spirit is one of bright and debonair gaiety, with sentimental interludes, and it exudes an atmosphere of amiable good nature that is curiously refreshing. The quality of friendliness is one of the most characteristic traits of an entertaining romantic comedy.

It would require, I should think, an excessive amount of serious-mindedness to keep one from entering into the genial mood of "Tovarich." All of its people are likeable, even the cruel but patriotic commissar, but the sympathy, of course, goes to the two exiles. And extremely engaging people they are, too. The authors have regarded them with both humor and affection, with the happy result that they are at the same time attractive and believable. Even the bourgeois French family, for whom the Russians work, has been treated with friendliness by the Messrs. Sherwood and Deval, instead of being subjected to satirical malice.

The Actors

In the original cast, the two leading roles were brilliantly played by the late John Halliday and Marta Abba, and I doubt if Herbert Berghof and Uta Hagen provide an equal amount of charm and style. But Mr. Berghof and Miss Hagen are, nevertheless, excellent in their playing, indicating the gallant and winning spirit of the exiles admirably. Luther Adler, who can sometimes overact astonishingly, provides one of his abler performances as the commissar, handling both the menace and the sincerity of the man with considerable skill. Romney Brent is at his humorous best as the banker.

The lesser roles are likewise properly managed. There are particularly good performances by Peter Brandon and the attractive Pat Crowley as the banker's decidedly Russophile children, by Paula Laurence as the bourgeois wife, and by Raymond Bramley as the president of the Bank of France. All of them help make "Tovarich" an extremely agreeable comedy. It does seem that playwrights were better at the trade of providing the comic touch a decade or so ago than they are today. But it also appears that they are improving considerably in the matter of production at the City Center.